

Coaches reflect on lost spring season

By **Charlie Kanzig**
Correspondent

Jeff Larson had assembled what may have been the most talented team of track boys in Sisters High School many years with a real shot to make a lot of noise at the state meet. The season ended without a single report of a starter's gun after Governor Kate Brown officially shut down schools across Oregon due to the coronavirus on Wednesday, April 8.

"From an athletic standpoint," said Athletic Director Gary Thorson, "this has no doubt been extremely tough and difficult on our athletes, their parents, and our coaches. I saw a lot of hard work and passion being put forth in both the offseason and this spring during the first few weeks before we got shut down."

Larson and many of his coaching peers reflected on the lost season over the past week.

"I am sad for our kids on many levels," he said. "There are individual goals which won't be met, personal records that won't happen, and most importantly, the unique lessons an athlete learns when they work hard with goals in mind."

In his final face-to-face practice with the track kids, Larson had a message for his athletes.

"I can tell you that on the day of our last practice, that Thursday, I had a gut feeling the season wouldn't go on and that it would be our last time sitting together on the grass at the beginning of practice," he said.

I took a moment to encourage the kids. My advice to them was, 'We can't control what comes

at us, we can only control how we react to it.' Advice as old as the hills, but I think it needed to be said at that moment. We went on and had a great practice that day too. Just amazing. The kids felt what was coming too and they just put it aside and threw themselves into the tasks of the day. Only kids can devote themselves to the moment with such abandon."

When asked about how the kids seem to be responding he said, "I'm hearing very little. Mostly it is hearsay through my daughter, a junior on the team, and social media. What I am hearing is that the seniors are frustrated and angry. The younger kids like my daughter are sad but seem to be rolling with it fairly well."

He continued, "There's talk of competing in the summer if the restrictions are lifted. And there's the optimism of youth: 'We'll do great next year' — and stuff like that. That's why I love working with kids."

Equestrian head coach Annie Winter said, "It's so sad. Our athletes have been practicing since mid-November and only got to perform in one of three meets. They are all bummed."

Alan Von Stein, girls tennis coach had high hopes for the season with 25 girls on the team, including 11 seniors.

"We were set for success and even had good weather," he said. "We were showing improvement every day and our new kids were picking up the sport at a rapid pace, so the season was looking pretty exciting."

Von Stein has taken the time to learn more about

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Commentary...

Sisters shows resilience in pandemic

By **Janel Ruehl**
Guest Columnist

As one of four focus areas of the Sisters Country Vision, "resiliency" has been top-of-mind for the Vision Implementation team this month, as Sisters Country grapples with changes to our daily lives, including the ways we connect with one another, plan for the future, care for the most vulnerable among us, and support our local economy. In these unprecedented times of global pandemic, the Vision Team has been inspired and encouraged by many examples of positive, community-led action. I had the honor of speaking with a few Sisters Country residents and local leaders who have learned to adapt and innovate to encourage community resiliency during COVID-19.

"The support for our first responders and healthcare workers has been amazing. Restaurants have been dropping off food, and some private citizens have been picking up food and dropping it off at the fire station," said Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire Chief Roger Johnson, whose local force has been on the front lines of emergency response and preparedness. His team has made significant changes to their daily operations to adapt to new CDC health and safety guidelines.

"Our primary goal is to continue to provide high-quality ambulance service, while mitigating risk for providers. This is a major challenge for a small agency like ours. If a few providers fall ill or need to be quarantined, that's a large percentage of

our workforce." Johnson points out. However, he has actually seen a decrease in demand for their services since the crisis began, which has him worried for another reason.

"We've seen a 20 percent reduction in ambulance transports. People aren't calling 911 as often and when they do, there's a hesitancy to go to the hospital. Even if they have conditions that should probably be evaluated in an emergency setting, they are hesitant to go. If people have serious conditions, they should still see a doctor," Johnson said.

The Fire District, along with other fire agencies, are also thinking ahead and looking for ways to prepare for the upcoming fire season while adapting to social distancing requirements.

"On the Sisters Ranger District, our goal is to fully staff two engines, a 10-person hand crew and the Black Butte Lookout. We're working to include daily temperature and wellness checks for firefighters, offering virtual fire trainings and briefings, increased sanitation of crew quarters, and the potential of quarantines before and after wildfire incidents, if needed," said District Ranger Ian Reid, who added that USFS has also recently authorized a powerline right-of-way clearing project to improve fire safety and resiliency.

Sisters resident Laura Wang found another way to

support first responders and healthcare workers. Along with friends Elisa Melton and Timothy Gorbald, she founded Central Oregon Emergency Mask Makers (COEMM), a Facebook group mobilizing local residents to produce and distribute PPE, including cloth masks, 3D-printed face shields, and soon, gowns. The group took off quickly, rapidly expanding to include more than 3,400 members who have produced over 18,000 masks. Wang says the group has attracted international interest, with members as far flung as India and Australia. The PPE produced by this dedicated corps of volunteers has been distributed to hospitals, medical clinics, home health aides, retirement and assisted living facilities, correctional facilities, and police and fire departments. They have supplied 35 major facilities, with fully 70 percent of masks going to hospitals. Facilities can sign up through the COEMM Facebook page to place a request for PPE.

"Our request list is growing day by day, but with the peak coming we may slow down a bit. We're trying to balance how to do this safely for all our volunteers" said Wang.

Janel Ruehl is Program Administrator for Community & Economic Development with Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council. She is working on implementation of the Sisters Country Vision Project.

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